

entrust it to the men and women of our Government who work day and night to keep us safe.

As they make their choice, Members of Congress must never forget: Somewhere in the world, at this very moment, terrorists are planning the next attack on America. And to protect America from such attacks, we must protect our telecommunications companies from abusive lawsuits.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 10 a.m. on February 22 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 23. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 22 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his address, the President referred to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at a Dinner for the National Governors Association Conference

February 24, 2008

Good evening. Laura and I are honored to have you here, and it's a pleasure to be here with a lot of friends. You know, I've developed a unique perspective on this event. For 6 years, I sat and watched the President speak; for 8 years, I was the President and spoke. [Laughter] And next year, I'll be watching on C-SPAN. [Laughter]

I appreciate Tim Pawlenty and Ed Rendell, who serve as the chair and vice chair of the National Governors Association. I congratulate our two newest Governors, Kentucky's Steve Beshear and Louisiana's Bobby Jindal. I might add, Jindal is not here, but he's ably represented by the first lady of Louisiana, Supriya. And I congratulate Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi for his reelection. I want to thank the Vice President and Lynne Cheney for joining us. I also tell you how thankful I am and honored we are that Vince Gill and Amy Grant have come tonight to entertain us.

I value our Governors because our Governors are some of the Nation's foremost policy entrepreneurs. I appreciate what you do.

I appreciate the sacrifice your families have made to serve America.

It was in that spirit that Teddy Roosevelt hosted the first Governors meeting here at the White House 100 years ago. I can't imagine what they were thinking about what America would look like 100 years ago, and I'm not sure what people will think 100 years from now. But I do know it makes sense to put wise policy in place in the meantime so America can remain prosperous and strong and free.

And so tonight it's my honor to welcome you all and to offer a toast to the Nation's Governors.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:30 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota; Gov. Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania; and entertainers Vince Gill and Amy Grant.

Remarks During a Meeting With the National Governors Association Conference

February 25, 2008

The President. Thank you very much. I'm supposed to stall to wait for the press corps. [Laughter] Chairman, thanks. Let me see your book there, will you? That thing right there, yes. Mr. Vice Chairman, thank you, sir. Hope you enjoyed last night.

Governor Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania. Yes, it was great.

The President. It was great, yes. It was fun. I am proud to announce to you that Janet Creighton is running the Intergovernmental Affairs Office for us. She looks forward to working with you. I look forward to hearing from you. There's a lot we can do to—for the next 10 months to work together. I like to tell people, you know, I'm going to finish strong, and I want to work with you as I do so.

A couple of areas I want to talk about, then I'll answer a couple of questions. And then evidently, we're going to have a 100th anniversary picture.

We share a responsibility to protect our country. I get briefed every morning about threats we face, and they're real. Now—and therefore, the question is, what do you do

about them? In my judgment, we have got to give the professionals who work hard to protect us all the tools they need. To put it bluntly: If the enemy is calling to America, we really need to know what they're saying, and we need to know what they're thinking, and we need to know what—who they're talking to.

It's—this is a different kind of struggle than we've ever faced before. It's essential that we understand the mentality of these killers. And so therefore, we worked with Congress to protect—pass the Protect America Act, which everybody knows has expired. And I want to share with you the core of the problem. And the problem is, should companies who are believed to have helped us—after 9/11 'til today—get information necessary to protect the country be sued? And my answer is, absolutely not. They shouldn't be sued for a couple of reasons.

One, it's not fair. Our Government told them that their participation was necessary—and it was and still is—and that what we had asked them to do was legal. And now they're getting sued for billions of dollars, and it's not fair. And it will create doubt amongst private sector folks who we need to help protect us.

Secondly, such lawsuits would require disclosure of information, which will make it harder to protect the country. You can imagine, when people start defending themselves, they're going to be asked all kinds of questions about tactics used. It makes absolutely no sense to give the enemy more knowledge about what the United States is doing to protect the American people.

Finally, it'll make it harder to convince companies to participate in the future. I mean, if you've done something that you think is perfectly legal and all of a sudden you're facing billions of dollars of lawsuits, it's going to be hard to provide—with credibility—assurances that we can go forward.

The Senate passed a good bill. You know, there's all kinds of talk about how this is a partisan issue. This is not a partisan issue. There is a very strong bipartisan bill that passed the Senate, and it's a bill that we can live with. And it's a bill that should be put on the House floor for a vote, up or down.

What I do want to share with you is that there's a lot of good folks, and you know it too. And I want to thank you all very much for these counterterrorism cells. I look at the Governor of New York; they got an unbelievably good cell—fusion center in New York City. And around our country, particularly in key areas, the cooperation between the Federal Government and the State government and the local government is superb. And I appreciate you all for providing really good leadership on this issue. It's an important, vital issue for the country.

Secondly, today—and I see that you've been given this book. This is a book which describes the faith-based and community organization initiative. And it breaks out by State the unbelievably good work that's taking place in your States.

Now, as you know, I'm a big believer that government ought to empower people who have got a great capacity to help change people's lives. Sometimes I like to say, government is not a very loving organization; it's an organization of law and justice. But there are thousands of loving people who are willing, if given help, to interface with brothers and sisters across the country that need help. And so this report is one that describes the Federal-State collaborative that's taken place.

There's 35 faith-based offices set up around—in different States. And for those of you who've got them, I thank you. We want to help you—want to coordinate. If you don't have one, I strongly urge you to take a look at what other Governors have done.

Billions of dollars have now gone into help these different community or faith-based groups meet specific needs. One such need is to help children whose parents may be in prison realize there is hope and love. Seventy thousand kids have been affected by this program. Another one is to help prisoners reenter society. It's a relatively new program and—but so far, we've helped—you've helped 10,000 people readjust.

Another is to provide script for somebody who needs help on drugs and alcohol and can redeem this at a regular counseling center or a faith-based center. But the whole purpose is to focus on results. You know, we

ought to be asking what works, not the process. And so I appreciate you taking a look at this. Again, I want to thank you for your cooperation, to the extent that you feel comfortable doing so. It's making a huge difference in people's lives, and I congratulate you all.

And finally, I want to spend a little time on health care. This obviously is a—you know, it's a tough issue here in Washington. And I do want to spend just a moment to explain to you the philosophy by which we'll be trying to get legislation passed out of the Congress.

One, we share the same goal, accessible and affordable health care. Secondly, whatever we do must not undermine a health care system that is the best in the world. Our doctors are great; our technology is unbelievable; our hospitals are wonderful. And is it perfect? No. But it is the best in the world. Private medicine has worked in America, and the question is, can we strengthen it, rather than weaken it?

And finally, I believe firmly that any good health care system is one that empowers individuals to be a better consumer, have more choices. And that was the whole spirit of the Medicare reforms. It's quite a controversial act up here in Washington. But time has passed, and there's some interesting news.

First of all, the—inherent in the Medicare reform was one that made no sense not to provide prescription drugs for seniors. I mean, you know, people would go get an operation for a heart ailment. It would cost the taxpayers thousands and thousands of dollars, but we wouldn't pay for the pills that could prevent the heart operation from being needed in the first place. It just made no sense. Medicare was an old system, and it was antiquated. And I firmly believed it needed reform.

Secondly, inherent in this reform was the idea of giving seniors a variety of choices. For example, now seniors have got choices for a different drug plan. Drug plans are now competing for the seniors' business. Seniors have got different options for other coverage in Medicare. And as a result of the competition, fostered by the fact that folks have got different decision points to make, they say, if you want my business, you're going to have

to do better; in other words, a market-oriented approach—the estimated cost of Medicare is down by \$240 billion over 10 years. You might remember, there was—when the Medicare debate was started, they were firing out all kinds of numbers. Well, it's 240 billion less than initially anticipated. I believe competition works; markets make sense.

And also in that bill was the health savings account reform, which gives individuals more decisionmaking over their own health care. It allows for a catastrophic policy and health—tax-free savings for monies not spent on ordinary expenses. It's a way, really, to enhance portability. Somebody told me the other day that if you're under 30 years old, you're likely to have had seven jobs when you reach your 30th birthday. It's a different era. People are moving around. There's a—you know, it's an exciting time, but it's also a time that creates uncertainty, particularly when it comes to somebody being able to carry a good health care policy with them.

So the notion is to empower consumers to be more in charge of their decisionmaking. There's now 4½ million people on HSAs. When given an opportunity, people are now taking a look at it. It's a difficult thing for people to understand. It's pretty complex. But nevertheless, when the consumers are being given more choices, more opportunities, with more knowledge—just like we're providing for our seniors—people make rational choices.

There is more we can do here in Washington, DC. I don't know if you've studied our Tax Code, but it is biased against people who want to buy an individual policy. If you're working for a company, you get a benefit when it comes to health care. If you're in the individual marketplace, you pay with after-tax dollars. And it's unfair, and it creates discrepancies. And it makes it harder to make sure private insurance is available at reasonable prices—more reasonable prices to the individual, which affects small businesses, sole proprietorships, the people that are really the lifeblood of our economy.

So I think Congress needs to make the Tax Code fair. Everybody ought to be treated the same in the Tax Code in order to encourage

the development of a market for private individuals, which will help your small-business owners and obviously help families.

Now, one of the interesting things that has taken place in the States, and one of—I think our jobs is—I said last night, you know, that the Governors are policy entrepreneurs. And I meant what I said. And I find it interesting that in certain States, like in Florida, private companies compete for Medicaid business. Like in Indiana, you know, Mitch has helped uninsured be able to participate in an HSA. Like in Oklahoma, you've helped the uninsured or low-income workers purchase health care through competition from—with Medicaid dollars.

In other words, there's some wonderful things going on, all market-driven. And we just want to facilitate those decisions because, in my judgment, the opposite of having the Government here in Washington be the decisionmaker will undermine private medicine, will make quality care more difficult.

And so those are some of the thoughts I wanted to share with you. I appreciate you giving me time. I'll answer a couple of your questions. I thank the national press corps for joining us. See you later. *[Laughter]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, chairman, and Gov. Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania, vice chairman, National Governors Association; Janet Creighton, Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs; Gov. Eliot Spitzer of New York; and Gov. Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., of Indiana.

Statement on the Situation in Burma *February 25, 2008*

The situation in Burma remains deplorable. The regime has rejected calls from its own people and the international community to begin a genuine dialog with the opposition and ethnic minority groups. Arrests and secret trials of peaceful political activists continue, such as the recent arrest of journalists Thet Zin and Sein Win Maung. Severe human rights abuses by the Burmese Army,

including burning down homes and killing civilians, continue in ethnic minority areas in eastern Burma.

The United States continues to seek a peaceful transition to a democratic government that will promote stability and prosperity in Burma and in the region. We support continued engagement by the U.N. Security Council and United Nations Secretary-General Ban's good offices mission, as well as sustained regional engagement.

As one element of our policy to promote a genuine democratic transition, the U.S. maintains targeted sanctions that focus on the assets of regime members and their cronies who grow rich while Burma's people suffer under their misrule. Therefore, today the Department of the Treasury has applied financial sanctions against Steven Law, a regime crony also suspected of drug trafficking activities, and his financial network, including his wife, father, and 14 companies, pursuant to Executive Order 13448.

Additionally, the Department of the Treasury has applied sanctions to two resorts owned and operated by known regime crony and arms merchant Tay Za, himself designated for sanctions in October 2007. Today's actions add to the 33 individuals and 11 entities previously designated. Furthermore, as a result of the enhanced visa restrictions that I announced in September 2007, 898 Burmese officials and their family members are now subject to visa restrictions.

Concerted international pressure is needed to achieve a genuine transition to democracy in Burma. We encourage Burma's neighbors and other stakeholders in Southeast Asia to impress upon the regime the need to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, to end military offensives and human rights abuses against ethnic minorities, and to begin a genuine transition to democracy in response to the demonstrated aspirations of all the peoples of Burma.

NOTE: The statement referred to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of the United Nations; Cecilia Ng and Lo Hsing Han, wife and father of Steven Law; and Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy in Burma.